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HD **The Berry College Green Team hosted their second annual eco-poetry slam on Saturday.**

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By

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The Berry College Green Team hosted their second annual eco-poetry slam on Saturday. Passionate students came together to express their concerns and feelings about environmental issues through verbalized art.

Students and teachers were invited to listen to or share poems, essays, songs and spoken words over coffee and doughnuts in the Jewel Box. Amongst the performers was senior Margaret Iva Ashton, who is also a part of Green Team and the originator of eco-poetry at Berry.

“Green Team works under residence life to improve sustainability on campus, particularly through grassroots, student-led initiatives,” Ashton said. “Eco-poetry was my idea, but I have no idea where it came from. I suppose that I am just a hippie at heart and have always enjoyed poetry.”

The goal of the eco-poetry slam was to provide participants with a space to express any of their emotions about climate change while still informing attendees.

“We hoped that this event would bring awareness to the serious environmental problems of today, as well as give students and faculty an outlet to express their feelings of frustration, grief, anger and hope,” Ashton said.

Senior Vanessa Delgado, who is not a part of the green team but an environmental enthusiast nonetheless, was the first performer. She recited “Evening” by Dorianne Laux as well as an original piece called “Tired.”

“The day before the event I was debating on whether or not I should actually do it, so I started looking through spoken word poetry online but there weren’t many that seemed like something I wanted to recite myself so I ended up writing my own poem as well in about an hour and a half,” Delgado said. “It just kind of came out of me so I decided to do my own original piece as well.”

Delgado often finds herself drawn towards the coffee house poetry slams because she enjoys performing renditions of spoken word poems that she finds online.

“Spoken word is poetry that has a verbal component to it, meaning that it can’t really be fully experienced on its own as a piece of writing unless it is spoken aloud,” Delgado said. “It’s half about the actual words and the rest is about the expression of them.”

Her original piece and her performance of “Evening,” which is about moonlight shining down on Earth’s beauty no matter what pain exists on the surface, were intended to convey the sense of doom and inevitability surrounding the current environmental crisis in an optimistic light.

“My poem was about the millennial experience of knowing that although none of this was our responsibility, but we still have to clean it up and we still have to do something about it or we will have to watch the world burn because we’re going to be here either way.” Delgado said. “It was more of a rant than anything, but I wanted to try and do something a bit more optimistic so I ended up just writing about my own feelings on climate change.”

Junior Sam Perry, an environmental science major who combined his knowledge of industrialized farming with his knack for playing guitar, performed two original songs.

“I think I have the comparative advantage in performing songs because most of my stuff is musical,” Perry said. “I find it a little easier to write good poetry if there’s music.”

Perry’s first piece, called “Whistling for My Home,” drew inspiration from western folk artists like Woody Guthrie and western literature authors like John Steinbeck.

“It’s about a character who is a dust bowl farmer,” Perry said. “The idea is whenever a dust bowl happened, the wind picked up and the land was just blown away into oblivion. It’s a heartbreaking thing that happened and it’s going to happen again. That’s why I like the line ‘whistling for my home’ because it’s like when you whistle for a dog. You whistle for something when it’s lost and you want it to come back.”

Rather than confining his music to a specific genre or theme, Perry prefers to let the melodies and lyrics speak for themselves.

“My favorite writers are the ones who can say a whole lot in a single phrase,” Perry said. “With poetry, the trick is that you’re trying to condense a huge idea into something that is brief, but not so compact that you can’t see through it. You’re not supposed to notice the poem itself but just supposed to, through the poem, reach the place it’s describing.”

“Whistling for My Home” describes some of the consequences of degrading lands due to industrial farming and painted a picture for listeners of what will happen to life on earth if we don’t start adapting to these changes.

“It was to almost terrify the listener into understanding how fragile the entire farming process is, and how dependent we are on the process we don’t think about and how messed up those processes are,” Perry said.

Perry used his song to pay homage to the strength of nature while maintaining the idea that nature cannot eternally withstand an abundance of unnatural manipulation.

“Nature is a horse that refuses to be broken but now it’s retaliating to a degree,” Perry said. “If we don’t begin paying attention to the original importances of nature and return to the old ways of thinking about our place within nature, then Gaia (mother nature) is going to kick us off like we’re a cult.”

Perry wrote his second song, “Gossamer of Mourning,” in partnership with his roommate, junior Jack Heerema. In contrast to his first song, “Gossamer of Mourning” had a more inspirational message at its core.

“We were intentionally trying to write a romantic era pastoral, or something that could work as a pastoral poem set to music, about the beautiful interconnectedness of the natural world as it stands without us,” Perry said. “We wanted to remind people what we’re fighting for.”

The Green Team plans to host an eco-poetry slam every February so that students and faculty will continually have a place to share their creative works.

“I encourage anyone on campus to come to any of the poetry slams and have the courage to show their work because the most important part about art is sharing it with the world,” Delgado said. “Humans are kind of hardwired to create and I think it’s really brave and wonderful to share such creations.”

For those who are less artistically inclined, the Green Team’s swap shop, located in the Dana lobby across from the residence desk, is open Monday through Thursday from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. and is an environmentally friendly way to participate in reducing waste by diminishing the clothing cycle.

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“Since we have a really big supply of cool stuff right now, I highly encourage people to come visit the swap shop and take free stuff,” said junior Amy Borton, member of Green Team. “You can leave anything for free or take anything for free.”

The group will also be hosting a recycling competition between residence halls at the end of the semester to see who can collect and turn in the most recycled products. This falls in line with Green Team’s efforts to constantly encourage environmental awareness on campus and in the daily lives of faculty and students.

“To anyone who is not taking the climate crisis seriously, please do some research because there is a lot of scientific material out there that will frighten you,” Ashton said. “To those who already know how bad the situation is, please keep fighting the good fight. We need you. Write poems, sing songs and protest against this corrupt system in your own ways every day.”

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